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The Dean of St. *PAUL's*

SERMON

Before the

Lord Mayor and Aldermen,

On *APRIL* 25. 1697.

Clarke Mayor.

Martis quarto die Maij 1697. *Annoque R. Rs.* Wilhelmi *Tertii* Angliæ, *&c. Nono.*

THIS Court doth desire Mr. Dean of St. *Paul's* to print his Sermon preached before the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of this City, on *Sunday* the 25th day of *April* last.

GOODFELLOW.

The Danger of corrupting the Faith by Philoſophy.

A

SERMON

Preach'd before the Right Honble the

Lord-Mayor,

AND

Court of Aldermen,

At GUILDHALL-CHAPPEL,

On SUNDAY, *APRIL* 25. 1697.

By WILLIAM SHERLOCK, D. D.
Dean of St. *Paul's*, Maſter of the *Temple*, and Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majeſty.

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COLOS. II. 8.

Beware leſt any man ſpoil you through Philoſophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Chriſt.

HAD St. *Paul* lived in our Age, it would have required little leſs than the Courage and Bravery of the Spirit of Martyrdom to have ſaid this: And nothing but the Authority of ſo great an Apoſtle (which though ſome men do not much value, yet they dare not openly deſpiſe) can ſkreen thoſe, who venture to ſay it after him.

What ſome men call Philoſophy and Reaſon (and there is nothing ſo fooliſh and abſurd which ſome men will not call ſo), is the only thing which thoſe men adore, who would either have no God, or a God and a Religion of their own making. And what Attempts ſome have made to undermine all Religion, and others to corrupt and tranſform the whole Frame of the Chriſtian Religion, upon a pretence of its contradicting Natural Reaſon and Philoſophy, is too well known to need a Proof. That thus it was in his days, and that thus it was likely to be in future Ages, St. *Paul* was very ſenſible, when he gave this Caution to his *Coloſſians*; and I'm ſure it is as proper a Caution for us, as ever it was for any Age ſince the writing of this

Epiſtle; for this vain Pretence to Reaſon and Philoſophy never more prevailed, and never did more miſchief to the world.

It is an endleſs and fruitleſs Task to go about to confute all the abſurd Hypotheſes and wild inconſiſtent Reaſonings wherewith men abuſe themſelves and others: The Experience of ſo many Ages wherein Philoſophy was in all its Glory, and the ſeveral Sects diſputed and wrangled eternally, without ending any one Controverſy, gives no great Encouragement to hope for much this way; at leaſt it can never be expected that ordinary Chriſtians ſhould be better inſtructed and confirmed in the Faith by Philoſophical Diſputes.

The Chriſtian Religion has from the very beginning been corrupted by a mixture of Philoſophy: Thus it was in the Apoſtles days, and thus it has been more or leſs in all Ages of the Church to this day; and the direction the Apoſtle gives for the ſecurity of the Chriſtian Faith, is, Not to diſpute ſuch matters, but to diſtinguiſh between Philoſophical Diſputes, and Matters of Revelation; and to reject all the Pretences of Philoſophy, when it does or ſeems to contradict the Faith of Chriſt, or would make any corrupt Additions to it.

Beware leſt any man ſpoil you through Philoſophy and vain deceit; συλαγωγῶν, is to make a Prey, or to carry away as a Prey; that is, to ſeduce them from the Chriſtian Faith, or from the Purity and Simplicity of it: *Through Philoſophy and vain deceit*, that is, through the *vain deceit of Philoſophy*, which cheats men with a flattering but empty appearance; may unſettle weak Minds, but cannot lay a ſure and ſolid foundation of Faith; may cheat men out of their Faith, but when that is done, can give them nothing certain in the room of it: For it is but *after the traditions*

of

of men, and *after the rudiments of this world:* Some of theſe Doctrines may poſſibly plead Preſcription, as having been ſo long received that no man knows their Original; or if they have the Authority of ſome Great Name, yet it is but a Human Authority, and they are but *the traditions of men*; and of men who at beſt had no better information than from the viſible appearances of Nature, and their own imperfect Obſervations, and corrupt or defective Reaſonings, *after the rudiments of this world:* And is this an Authority to oppoſe againſt the Faith of Chriſt, which both wants that Divine Confirmation which he gave to his Doctrines, and contradicts them? For they are *not after Chriſt*, neither taught by Chriſt, nor conſonant to what he taught.

Theſe Words might afford great Variety of Diſcourſe; but I ſhall confine my ſelf to what is moſt Uſeful, and reduce that into as narrow a compaſs as I can, by ſhewing,

I. What great need there is of this Caution, To *beware leſt any man ſpoil us through Philoſophy and vain deceit.*

II. What great reaſon we have to reject all theſe vain Pretences to Philoſophy, when they are oppoſed to the Authority of a Divine Revelation.

I. As for the firſt of theſe, Whoever conſiders what an Enemy theſe vain Pretences to Philoſophy have always been to Religion, will ſee need enough for this Caution.

True Reaſon, and the true Knowledge of Nature, which is true Philoſophy, would certainly direct us to the Acknowledgment and Worſhip of that Supreme Being who made the World: And yet we know, that there never was an Atheiſt without ſome Pretence to Philoſophy, and generally ſuch loud noiſy Pretences too, as make igno-

rant people think them very notable Philoſophers, and that tempts ſome vain empty perſons to affect Atheiſm, that they may be thought Philoſophers.

That this is *vain deceit*, all men muſt own, who believe there is a God: And if it be poſſible to pretend Philoſophy for Atheiſm it ſelf, it is no great wonder if it be made to patronize Infidelity and Hereſy: But this plainly ſhews of what dangerous Conſequence it is to admit Philoſophical Diſputes into Religion, which if at any time they may do any ſervice to Religion, much oftner greatly corrupt it, and ſhake the very Foundations of it; of which more anon.

At preſent I ſhall only ſhew you how the Matter of Fact ſtands; That moſt of the Diſputes in Religion are nothing elſe but the Diſputes of Philoſophy, and therefore according to the Apoſtolical Command, to be wholly flung out of Religion, and not ſuffered to affect our Faith one way or other. To be a Philoſopher and a Chriſtian, to Diſpute and to Believe, are two very different things; and yet it is very evident, that moſt of the Arguments againſt Revelation in general, and moſt of the Diſputes about the particular Doctrines of Chriſtianity, are no better than this *vain deceit of Philoſophy*; that were the matters of Faith, and the Diſputes of Philoſophy truly diſtinguiſhed, this alone would be ſufficient to ſettle the Faith of Chriſtians, and reſtore Peace and Unity, at leaſt in the great Fundamentals of Religion, to the Chriſtian World.

1. As to begin with Revelation in general. The Books of *Moſes* are the moſt Ancient, and that conſidered, the beſt atteſted Hiſtory in the World; the whole Nation of the *Jews*, whoſe Hiſtory he writes, pay the greateſt veneration to him; and if we believe the Matters of Fact which he relates, he was certainly an Inſpired Man, who could

could neither deceive, nor be deceived. And it is impoſſible to have greater Evidence for the Truth and Authenticalneſs of any Writings, at ſuch a diſtance of time, than we have for the Writings of the *New Teſtament*; and indeed the Infidels of our Age have very little to ſay purely againſt the Credibility of the Hiſtory; and then one would think, that all their other Objections ſhould come too late, unleſs they will juſtify *Pharaoh* in disbelieving *Moſes*, and the *Scribes* and *Phariſees* in disbelieving our Saviour, after all the Miracles they did: For if they will disbelieve *Moſes* and Chriſt, though they have nothing material to object againſt the Truth of theſe Hiſtories; nothing, which they would allow to be good Objections againſt any other Hiſtory; they muſt by the ſame reaſon have disbelieved them, though they had ſeen them do all thoſe great Works which are reported of them in ſuch Credible Hiſtories. But whatever the Authority of theſe Books are, they think they may ſecurely reject them, if they contain any thing which contradicts their Reaſon and Philoſophy, and they find a great many ſuch things to quarrel with: They think *Moſes*'s Hiſtory of the Creation very unphiloſophical; That the Story of *Eve* and the Serpent is an incredible Fiction; That the Univerſal Deluge is abſolutely impoſſible, and irreconcileable with the Principles of Philoſophy; and it does not become Philoſophers to have recourſe to Miracles: That what we call Miracles are not the effects of a Divine Power, but may be reſolved into Natural Cauſes; That Inſpiration and Propheſy is nothing but Natural Enthuſiaſm, and all the Pretences to Revelation a Cheat and Impoſture; That Nature teaches us all that we need to know; That there is no other certain knowledge but this; That we are not bound to believe any thing which our own Reaſon cannot graſp and comprehend, and therefore Revelation is perfectly uſeleſs; and God himſelf cannot oblige

oblige us to believe any thing which does not agree with the Reaſon of our own Minds, and the Philoſophy of Nature. Thoſe who underſtand the Myſtery of Modern Infidelity, know that theſe, and ſuch like, are the wiſe Reaſons for which they reject and ridicule all Revealed Religion, and endeavour to rob and ſpoil men of one of the greateſt Bleſſings in the World, A Divine Revelation. So that Infidelity is reſolved into theſe vain Pretences to Philoſophy, that Men will underſtand how to make, deſtroy, and govern the World better than God.

2. As theſe men oppoſe Reaſon and Philoſophy to Revelation, ſo others either deny the fundamental Articles of Chriſtianity for the ſake of ſome Philoſophical Difficulties, or corrupt the Doctrines of Chriſtianity by a mixture of Philoſophy. The Goſpel of our Saviour is the plaineſt Revelation of the Will of God that ever was made to the World; all its Doctrines are eaſily underſtood, without Art and Subtilty; and yet there is not a more nice, intricate, perplext thing in the World, than what ſome men have made the Chriſtian Faith: All the Subtil Diſputes of Philoſophy are brought into the Church; and *Plato* and *Ariſtotle* are become as great Apoſtles, as St. *Peter*, or St. *Paul*: As to give ſome few Inſtances of it; for time will not permit me to diſcourſe it at large.

What are the *Arian*, *Socinian*, *Pelagian* Controverſies, but meer Philoſophical Diſputes, with which theſe Hereticks corrupted the Catholick Faith?

There is nothing more plain and expreſs in Scripture than the Faith of *Father*, *Son*, *and Holy Ghoſt*, *or the Doctrine of the Trinity in Unity*; and that great Art and Subtilty which has been uſed, and to ſo little purpoſe, to pervert thoſe Texts of Scripture, wherein this Doctrine is contained, is an evident proof, That this is the plain, natural obvious ſenſe of thoſe Texts, ſince it requires ſo much Art and

and Criticiſm to put any other ſenſe on them; and that will not do neither, till men are reſolved rather to make any thing of Scripture, than to find *a real Trinity* there. If then this Faith be ſo plainly contained in Scripture, what makes all this diſpute about it? What makes thoſe, who profeſs to believe the Scripture, ſo obſtinate againſt this Faith? Truly that which makes ſome men Infidels, makes others Hereticks, that is, a vain pretence to Philoſophy.

The firſt Philoſophical Diſpute is about the Divine Unity: We all own with the Scripture, that there is but One God; but we ſay further, as the Scripture teaches us, *That there are Three, Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, each of which is true and perfect God.* This they ſay is a Contradiction; and if it be ſo, there is an end of this Faith, for both parts of a Contradiction can't be true: But to be Three and One upon different accounts, and in different ſenſes, is no Contradiction; for thus Three may be One, and One Three; and this is all the Scripture teaches, or that we profeſs to believe, whatever the Myſtery of this Diſtinction and Unity be: But this will not ſatisfy theſe Philoſophical Wits, unleſs they can comprehend how Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, are really and diſtinctly Three, and eſſentially One, the manner of which the Scripture gives no account of, and therefore this is no Diſpute in Faith, but only in Philoſophy.

Another Objection concerns the Divine Generation, how God can beget a Son of his own Subſtance; which the *Arians* thought inferred a diviſion of the Divine Subſtance.

And a Third Objection concerns an Eternal Generation; how it is poſſible that the Father ſhould beget an Eternal Son; that the Son ſhould be begotten without any begin-

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ning of Being; and that the Father ſhould not be at leaſt ſome few moments before the Son, and conſequently the Son not Eternal. Now we all grant that we can give no Philoſophical account of this, no more than we can of the ſimple Divine Eſſence, or of Eternity it ſelf; but we may believe that God has an Eternal Son, as we do that there is an Eternal God, without knowing how any thing is Eternal: Theſe are Diſputes in Philoſophy, and ſuch as none but vain men will diſpute about, as being acknowledged above our Comprehenſion, and therefore no reaſonable Objection againſt our Faith.

Thus as for the Doctrine of the Incarnation, nothing can be plainer in Scripture, than that *the Son of God was made man*; That *the Word was made fleſh, and dwelt among us*; That *God was manifeſt in the fleſh*: And all the diſputes about this Article are purely Philoſophical: Some men reject it, becauſe they cannot underſtand how God and Man can be united in one Perſon: Others confound the Divine and Human Nature, as *Eutyches* did; or divide the Perſons, as *Neſtorius* did; both which indeed deſtroy the Article of the Incarnation; for the Word is not made Fleſh, unleſs the ſame Perſon, who is God, is Man too, and continues perfect God and perfect Man after this Union: But all theſe diſputes concern the Philoſophy of the Union of the Divine and Human Nature in Chriſt; and if we would ſeparate between Faith and Philoſophy, ſuch diſputes might ſoon be ended.

Thus moſt of the difficulties in the *Pelagian* and *Quinquarticular* Controverſy, are ultimately reſolved into mere Philoſophical diſputes about Fate and Preſcience, Liberty and Neceſſity, and God's concourſe with Creatures, or the Powers of Nature and Grace: And would time permit, it were eaſy to ſhew this in moſt of the Controverſies of Religion, That it is not what God has revealed, and what he

he requires us to believe, but ſuch Nice Philoſophical Queſtions as men raiſe about theſe matters, which occaſion all theſe diſputes.

It has often been propoſed as a means of Union to ſilence all diſputes, To confine our ſelves to Scripture-Words and Expreſſions, without determining the ſignification of them: But this would make only an Agreement in Words, not a Conſent in Opinions; nor could it ſecure the Peace of the Church, while all men knew, that under the ſame form of Words, they had very different and contrary Meanings, which would ſtill make them as much Hereticks to each other, as if their Words did as expreſly contradict each other, as their Faith. But would men reduce all their diſputes to Scripture, and make that the only Rule of their Faith, without intermixing any Philoſophical diſputes with it, this would be an infallible means of Union; for it is only this vain pretence to Philoſophy, which raiſes all theſe diſputes, and then tempts men to pervert the Scriptures to juſtify their Philoſophy.

In all theſe caſes we are concerned to enquire what the true ſenſe of the Article is; for this the Scripture teaches, and ſo far our Faith is concerned; and theſe are not only juſtifiable, but neceſſary diſputes, if the true Faith be neceſſary: And ſuch were the diſputes of the Catholick Fathers with the *Sabellian*, *Arian*, and *Photinian* Hereticks; Whether Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, were only Three Names, or Three Appearances and Manifeſtations of the ſame One ſingle Perſon, or any other Three, but Three True, Proper, Coeternal, and Coequal Perſons: Or whether He, who is in Scripture called the Son of God, be a Creature, though the moſt Excellent Creature; or a Son, and God by Nature, truly begotten of his Father's Subſtance: Or whether Chriſt be God Incarnate, or a meer Man: And their ancient Creeds pretended to no

more, than to teach what the Catholick Faith was, not to expound the Philoſophy of the Trinity and Incarnation. And thus far we muſt explain the Faith, as to know, and to let others know, what it is we believe; and if to aſſert the ancient Catholick Faith againſt old and new Hereſies, ſhould be called New Explications, we cannot help it; for we muſt explain what the Scripture teaches about theſe Articles, and how the Catholick Church always underſtood them: But that which we are to beware of, is, Not to mix Philoſophy with our Faith, nor to admit of any mere Philoſophical Objections againſt the Faith, nor to attempt any Explications of theſe Myſteries, beyond what the Scriptures, and the Faith and Practice of the Catholick Church will juſtify.

Indeed the Importunity of Hereticks did very often engage the Catholick Fathers in Philoſophical diſputes; but this they did, not to explain the Chriſtian Myſteries by Philoſophy, but only to ſhew, that as incomprehenſible as theſe Myſteries are, the Philoſophy of Hereticks, and their Objections againſt theſe Articles, were very abſurd: And ſuch diſputes as theſe may ſometimes be abſolutely neceſſary, and of great uſe to ſhame theſe vain Pretences to Philoſophy, while we do not put the Trial of our Faith upon this Iſſue.

Secondly, Let us now conſider what great reaſon we have to reject all the vain Pretences to Reaſon and Philoſophy, when oppoſed to a Divine Revelation. For that is all the Apoſtle intends in this Caution; not to diſcourage the uſe of Reaſon, or the ſtudy of Philoſophy, which are great Improvements, and a delightful Entertainment of Human Minds, and with a wiſe and prudent Conduct may be very ſerviceable to Religion too; but we muſt not ſet up any Concluſions in Philoſophy againſt the Chriſtian Faith, nor corrupt the Faith with a mixture of Philoſophy,

nor

nor reject any revealed Truths, for want of Natural Ideas to conceive them by.

To ſhorten this Diſcourſe as much as I can; I ſhall at preſent only ſhew you what reaſon we have to believe thoſe Doctrines which are thought the moſt myſterious and inconceivable, notwithſtanding any Objections from Natural Reaſon and Philoſophy againſt them. And the account of this muſt be reſolved into the Nature, Uſe, and Authority of Revelation; that Revelation, as to ſuch matters as are knowable only by Revelation, muſt ſerve inſtead of Senſe, Natural Ideas, and Natural Reaſon; that is, That we muſt believe things which we do not ſee, things which we have no Natural Notion or Conception of, things which are not evident to Natural Reaſon; for without this, there is little uſe of Faith, no Authority of pure Revelation.

It is true, the general Corruption of Mankind made it very neceſſary for God to revive the Laws of Nature, and to reinforce the obſervation of them by his own Authority and Command; but the proper work of Revelation is to diſcover ſuch things to us as Nature cannot teach, of which we have no Natural Notion, nor any Natural Evidence; At leaſt, thus it may be, if God knows more than Natural Reaſon teaches, or can comprehend; and thinks it fit to reveal ſuch Supernatural Truths to us, when he ſees it uſeful for Mankind.

Now if God ever does reveal ſuch things to us, if we believe upon God's Authority (which is the ſtrict Notion of a Divine Faith), we muſt believe without any Natural Evidence, merely becauſe God has revealed it; and then we muſt believe ſuch things as are not evident to Senſe and Reaſon; and then it can be no Objection againſt Revelation, nor againſt the belief of any ſuch ſupernatural Truths, that we have no Natural Notion, nor Na-

tural evidence of them, that they are what we cannot conceive and comprehend.

To believe no farther than natural Reaſon can conceive and comprehend, is to reject the Divine Authority of Revelation, and to deſtroy the diſtinction between Reaſon and Faith. He who will believe no farther than natural Reaſon approves; believes his Reaſon, not the Revelation; and is in truth a Natural Philoſopher, not a Believer: He believes the Scriptures, as he would believe *Plato* and *Tully*; not as inſpired Writings, but as agreeable to Reaſon and the reſult of wiſe and deep Thoughts; and this puts an end to all the diſputes about Faith and Revelation at once: For what uſe is there of Faith? What matter whether the Scriptures be divinely Inſpired or not, when we are no farther concerned with them than with other Human Writings, to believe what they teach agreeable to our own Reaſon? Let theſe Men then either reject Faith and Scripture, or confeſs, That Revelation, as to all Supernatural Truths, muſt ſerve us inſtead of Senſe and Reaſon. I would gladly know of them, Whether they would not believe ſuch ſupernatural Truths, as are not evident to Reaſon, were they ſure that God had Revealed them? I gueſs they will not be ſo hardy as to ſay, That they would not believe God himſelf, ſhould he Reveal ſuch things as their Reaſon cannot comprehend; and if they would believe God in ſuch matters, Why will they not believe a Revelation, which they themſelves acknowledge to be Divine, in ſuch matters? For is there any difference between believing God, and believing a Divine Revelation? If God does know, and can reveal ſuch Myſteries, and is to be believed when he does reveal them, and ſuch Doctrines are contained in an undoubted Revelation; then the unconceivableneſs of them can be no argument againſt the Truth of the Revelation, or that ſenſe of the words, which contains ſuch Myſteries.

Let

Let us then conſider the natural conſequence of this, which is of great moment in this diſpute, *viz.* That we muſt allow of no Objections againſt Revealed Myſteries, which we will not allow to be good Objections againſt Senſe and Reaſon; which is a neceſſary and unavoidable conſequence if Revelation, with reſpect to ſupernatural Truths, ſtand in the place of Senſe and Reaſon.

Now no man queſtions the truth of what he ſees and feels, or what he can prove to be true by plain and undeniable Reaſon, merely becauſe there are unconceivable difficulties in it; as there are in every thing, even the moſt certain and familiar things in Nature: And if Revealed Truths are not more unconceivable than many natural objects of Senſe and Reaſon, Why ſhould their being unconceivable be a greater Objection againſt believing a Revelation, than it is againſt believing our Senſe and Reaſon in matters equally unconceivable? When God has Revealed to us, That he has an Eternal and Only Begotten Son, though we cannot comprehend the Myſtery of the Eternal Generation, Why ſhould we not as firmly believe it, as we do, that Man Begets a Son in his own likeneſs, the Philoſophy of which we as little underſtand? Nor can we any more conceive the Union of the Soul and Body, than we do the Incarnation of the Son of God, or the Union of the Divine and Human Nature in one Perſon? And if we own the Authority of Revelation, Why ſhould we not as well believe what Revelation teaches, how unconceivable ſoever it be, as we do what Senſe and Reaſon teaches, though it be alike unconceivable?

All men are ſenſible, that it is very abſurd and fooliſh to deny the Being of any thing which they have certain evidence of, becauſe they cannot comprehend the Nature and Reaſons of it: The Man who roſe up and walked before the Philoſopher, who was diſputing ſubtilly againſt the

the poſſibility of Motion, put a ſcorn upon all his Arguments, by ſhewing him that he could Move: And therefore we ſee, that all men believe their Senſes and Reaſon againſt all the difficulties in Nature, and will never be perſuaded, by the ſubtilleſt Diſputant, That that is not, which they certainly ſee and know to be. Now for the ſame reaſon, if men will allow the Authority of Revelation, they muſt believe what is Revealed, how unconceivable and incomprehenſible ſoever its nature be; for when we know that a thing is, (and this may be known by Revelation as well as by Senſe, as thoſe men muſt confeſs, who acknowledge a Divine Revelation) no difficulties in conceiving it, muſt perſuade us to deny that it is.

This is very plain in it ſelf, though few men conſider it, That to disbelieve what is Revealed, for the ſake of any difficulties in underſtanding or conceiving it, is to reject the certainty of Revelation; For what other account can be given of that difference men make between the Evidence of Senſe and Reaſon, and of Revelation, but that they allow Senſe and Reaſon to be good and certain proofs of the being of ſuch things as are evident to Senſe and Reaſon, how myſterious ſoever their Natures are; but that mere Revelation is no certain proof of the being of any thing which is not evident alſo to Senſe and Reaſon, how plainly ſoever it be Revealed; that is, that Revelation alone can prove nothing; for if Revelation it ſelf could prove the certainty of what is Revealed, the difficulties in Nature and Philoſophy could no more diſprove a Revelation, than confute our Senſes. Now let any man judge, whether this be not unequal uſage, to expect more from Revelation, than they do from Senſe and Reaſon, and not to believe Revelation upon the ſame terms that they believe their Senſes.

Should men reſolve to believe nothing which they ſee, till they could give a Philoſophical account of the Reaſons, and

and Cauſes, and Natures, of all they ſee, as they refuſe to believe a Revelation any farther than they can conceive and comprehend the thing Revealed, they muſt of neceſſity be as great Scepticks, as they are Infidels. For as for contradictions, it is an eaſy matter to make or find ſeeming contradictions in what we do not underſtand; for when we know not the Philoſophical Natures of things, nor how they act, and yet will be reaſoning and gueſſing at them, all our falſe gueſſes may be full of contradictions and impoſſibilities, becauſe we know not the true Myſtery of Nature. It is this vain humour of Criticizing upon Nature which makes ſo many Atheiſts. They go upon the ſame Principle with Infidels and Hereticks, To believe nothing which natural Reaſon cannot conceive and comprehend; now they cannot comprehend the Notion and Idea of a God, which they ſay, is made up of Contradictions and impoſſibilities, and therefore they reject the Being of a God: They cannot conceive a Creating Power, which can give Being to that which had no Being before, which they think a plain Contradiction to make Something of Nothing; and therefore they reject the Creation of the World, and either aſſert the Eternity of the World, or at leaſt the Eternity of Matter: They can conceive no Subſtance but Matter and Body, and therefore reject the Notion of a Spirit, as Nonſenſe and Contradiction: They will allow nothing to be wiſely made, which they underſtand not the reaſon and uſes of, and therefore they fancy a great many botches and blunders in Nature, which cannot be the deſigns and contrivance of Wiſdom, but the effects of Chance; and then the conſequence is plain, That the World was made by Chance, not by a Wiſe Author.

Now, I confeſs, if this way of Reaſoning be allowed, it will be impoſſible to defend either Senſe, or Reaſon, or Revelation,

Revelation, againſt the Cavils of Atheiſts and Infidels; for there are unconceivable and incomprehenſible Secrets and Myſteries in them all; and if to conceive and comprehend the Natures of things muſt be made the meaſure and ſtandard of true and falſe, we muſt deny our Senſes and Reaſon, as well as our Faith; and if we do and muſt believe our Senſe and Reaſon beyond our Comprehenſion, Why muſt we believe nothing that is Revealed, any farther than we can conceive and comprehend the Nature and Reaſons of it?

The Sum is this: Humane Knowledge, whatever the means of knowing be, whether Senſe, or Reaſon, or Revelation, does not reach to the Philoſophical Cauſes and Natures of things, but only to their Being, and Natural Vertues and Powers; and as a Wiſe man, who knows the meaſure of his Underſtanding, expects no more from Senſe and Reaſon, than to know what things there are in the World, and what they are, as far as they fall under the notice of Senſe and Natural Reaſon; ſo we muſt expect no more from Revelation, than the knowledge of ſuch things as Senſe and Natural Reaſon cannot diſcover. But we muſt no more expect the Philoſophy of Supernatural Truths from Revelation, than we do the Myſteries of Nature from Senſe and Reaſon.

Now ſince Human Knowledge is not a knowledge of the Myſterious Natures of things, but only to know what things there are, and what they are; there can be no contradiction between Senſe, and Reaſon, and Revelation; unleſs one denies what the other affirms, not that one teaches more than the other teaches, or that one cannot comprehend what the other teaches. Reaſon teaches more than Senſe teaches, or can comprehend; and Revelation teaches more than either Senſe or Natural Reaſon teaches, or can comprehend; but this is no contradiction, but only

only a ſubordination between theſe different kinds and degrees of Knowledge; but as for Unconceivableneſs and Incomprehenſibility, that is no argument againſt any thing; for Senſe and Natural Reaſon can no more comprehend their own Objects, than they do what is revealed: And it is manifeſt perverſeneſs to make that an objection againſt Revelation, which we will not allow to be an objection againſt Senſe and Reaſon.

This is ſufficient as to the reaſon of the thing; but as far as it is poſſible to remove mens Prejudices alſo againſt believing Myſteries, I ſhall briefly anſwer two very popular Objections.

1. It is thought very unnatural, that when God has made us reaſonable Creatures, and therefore made Natural Reaſon to us the meaſure of Truth and Falſhood, he ſhould require us to believe without Reaſon; as we muſt do, if he reveals ſuch things to us as we know not, and cannot poſſibly know the reaſons of. If we muſt believe with our Underſtanding, how can we believe things which we cannot underſtand?

This were a reaſonable Objection, were it true; for we cannot believe what we have no knowledge, nor underſtanding of; for Faith is Knowledge, though not Natural Knowledge.

But do we not underſtand what it is we believe? Do we not know what we mean, when we ſay, We believe in Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt? Nay, do not our Adverſaries underſtand what we mean by it? How then come they to charge us with believing Contradictions and Impoſſibilities? For if they know not what we believe, they cannot know whether we believe Contradictions or not. And if we do underſtand what it is we believe, then we do not believe without underſtanding, which

is abſolutely impoſſible, if we know what it is we believe.

And we know alſo why we believe: Our Faith is founded in Senſe and Reaſon, and reſolved into the Authority of God, which is the higheſt and moſt infallible Reaſon. The Miracles which Chriſt and his Apoſtles wrought, were evident to Senſe, and owned by Reaſon to be the effects of a Divine Power; and the Anſwer the Blind man gave to the *Phariſees*, when Chriſt had opened his Eyes, ſpeaks the true ſenſe of Nature: *Herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not ſinners; but if any man be a worſhipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind: If this man were not of God, he could do nothing*, 9. John 30, 31, 32, 33. And all Mankind own, that the moſt abſolute Faith is due to God, and to thoſe who ſpeak from God; and this, as I take it, is to believe with Reaſon

But ſtill we believe ſuch things, whoſe Natures we do not underſtand, and cannot account for by Natural Reaſon, and this is to believe without Reaſon. We believe, that God the Father hath an Eternal Son, and an Eternal Spirit; and that Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, are but One Eternal God; but this is what Natural Reaſon cannot comprehend, nor give us any notion or conception of, how God can have an Eternal Son, and an Eternal Spirit, really diſtinct from himſelf, and yet with himſelf One Eternal and Infinite God: Reaſon can give no account of the Eternal Generation of the Son, nor of the Eternal Proceſſion of the Holy Spirit; and is not this to believe without Reaſon, which a reaſonable Creature ought not to do, and which we ought not to think, that God who made us reaſonable Creatures, expects from us?

And

And this I grant would be a material Objection, were Reaſon the Judge of the Nature and Philoſophy of things; and did Reaſon require us to believe nothing but what we underſtand and comprehend. But then we muſt no more believe Senſe and Reaſon, than Revelation; for we do not comprehend the Nature of any one thing in the World, how evident ſoever it is to Senſe and Reaſon, that there are ſuch things. Nature is as great a Myſtery as Revelation; and it is no greater affront to our Underſtandings, no more againſt Reaſon for God to reveal ſuch things to us as our Reaſon cannot comprehend, than it is to make a whole World, which Reaſon cannot comprehend.

When we make it an Objection againſt any thing, That it is without Reaſon, or, as we apprehend, againſt Reaſon, and contrary to Reaſon; we muſt firſt conſider whether it be the proper Object of Reaſon; otherwiſe it is no Objection; as it is no objection againſt Sounds, that we cannot ſee them; nor againſt Colours, that we cannot hear them; becauſe Sounds are not the Objects of Sight, nor Colours of Hearing.

Now no man pretends, that the pure Natures and Eſſences of things, or their Eſſential Reaſons, Properties, Unions, Operations, are the Objects of Humane Reaſon; for no man living knows any thing about them.

And yet this is all the Incomprehenſibility men have to complain of in the Doctrine of the Trinity, and the Incarnation; That they cannot comprehend, how God can beget an Eternal Son; nor how Three Divine Perſons ſhould be ſo united, as to be eſſentially One God; nor how the Divine and Humane Nature can be united into One Perſon, God-man: All which concern the Eſſence, and Eſſential Properties, Operations, Unions, Relations of the Deity, which a modeſt man might allow to be incomprehenſible, if God be Infinite, though he could com-

prehend the Natures, Eſſences, and Eſſential Reaſons and Properties of Created Beings; but when all Created Nature is ſuch a Myſtery to us, that we know not the pure Nature and Eſſence of any one thing in the World, is it an affront to our Reaſon, that we cannot comprehend the Divine Nature?

Such Matters as theſe are neither without Reaſon, nor againſt Reaſon, nor contrary to Reaſon; becauſe Reaſon has nothing to do with them, and can take no cognizance of them: They belong not to Reaſon, but to that Infinite Mind, which comprehends it Self, and the Ideas of all poſſible Beings. A perfect comprehenſive Knowledge of Nature belongs only to the Maker of all things; for it is not only to know what things are, but how to make them; which would be a vain Curioſity, and uſeleſs Knowledge to thoſe, who have not a Making and Creating Power. This is to know things *à priori*, with an Intuitive Ideal Knowledge, which is infinitely more ſuperior to Reaſon, than Reaſon is to Senſe: And it is the affectation of this Intuitive making Knowledge, which makes ſome men Atheiſts, and others Hereticks.

2dly. Another great Objection againſt ſuch a Revelation as contains matters which Natural Reaſon cannot comprehend, is, To what purpoſe ſuch a Revelation ſerves? What Merit there can be in believing ſuch Doctrines? And of what good uſe ſuch a Faith can be to us?

Now I confeſs I cannot think it meritorious merely to believe things which are incomprehenſible; or that God any more intended to puzzle our Faith with revealed Myſteries, than to puzzle our Reaſon in making a Myſterious World. Whether we receive our information from Senſe, or Natural Reaſon, or Revelation, it is certain we muſt believe Myſteries, if we believe any thing; for all things have ſomething myſterious and incomprehenſible in their

their natures; what natural Reaſon cannot account for, and what God never intended we ſhould underſtand: for God never intended to teach us how to make the World, nor how every Creature was made; and therefore we cannot and are not concerned to know the internal frame and conſtitution of Nature.

But though neither Natural nor Revealed Knowledge extends to the Reaſons and Cauſes of Nature, and of eſſential Properties and Operations; yet both natural and revealed Knowledge is of as much uſe to us, as if we did perfectly underſtand all the ſecret and incomprehenſible Myſteries of the nature of God, or of the natures of Creatures. Both natural and revealed Knowledge are alike upon this account, That they only acquaint us what things are, and what ends they ſerve; and then we know what uſe to make of them, without underſtanding the ſecret Myſteries of Nature.

Is this World, or any thing in it, the leſs uſeful to us, becauſe we cannot conceive how God created all things of nothing? Or becauſe we do not underſtand the nature of Matter, nor how the ſeveral parts of Matter came by their different Virtues and Qualities? Is Corn, or Fruit, or Herbs, the leſs nouriſhing or refreſhing, becauſe we know not how they grow? Does it require any Philoſophy to know how to eat, and drink, and ſleep? Will not our Food nouriſh us, unleſs we underſtand how it is concocted, and turned into Chyle, and Blood, and Spirits? Nay, is it of no uſe to know that God is an Eternal, Omnipotent, Omniſcient, Omnipreſent Being, unleſs we can conceive how any Being can be Eternal without a Cauſe, and without a Beginning? Or can comprehend how he can do and know all things; and be preſent in all places at once, without Extenſion, and without Parts? We may make all the uſe that can be made of this world, and of every

every thing in it, without underſtanding the eſſential Reaſons and Cauſes, or internal Nature of any thing; and we muſt do ſo, if we will make any uſe of it; and we know God to all the ends and purpoſes for which Creatures ought to know God, though his Nature be incomprehenſible.

And thus it is in matters of pure Revelation, ſuch as the Doctrine of the Trinity, and the Incarnation; how unaccountable ſoever the Myſtery of a Trinity in Unity, the Eternal Generation, and the Incarnation of the Son of God be, yet it is the moſt uſeful Knowledge in the world: Though we know not how the Eternal Father begat an Eternal Son of his own Subſtance, nor how this Eternal Son in time became Man; yet it is the moſt deſirable knowledge in the world to ſinners; to know, That God has an Eternal Son; and *that he ſo loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son for the redemption of mankind, that whoſoever believes in him, ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life*; and that this Eternal Son of God became Man, lived a poor, neceſſitous, laborious Life, and died an accurſed Death for the Salvation of Sinners; and to know, That the Holy Spirit, which proceeds from Father and Son, dwells in the Chriſtian Church, and quickens and animates the whole Body of Chriſt. If this be true (as we muſt ſuppoſe in this Argument), all Mankind muſt confeſs, that this is a very uſeful Knowledge; and never the leſs uſeful, becauſe a Trinity in Unity, and the Eternal Generation, and the Incarnation of the Son of God, are great and inconceivable Myſteries. Could we give a Rational and Philoſophical Account of the Eternal Generation, and of the Incarnation, we ſhould know more than we now do; but Faith makes it as uſeful to all the purpoſes of Religion, as the moſt perfect intuitive Knowledge could do.

This

This is a ſufficient Anſwer to that Objection againſt the Uſefulneſs of ſuch Myſteries as have ſomething incomprehenſible and unconceivable in their Natures: Which is an equal Objection againſt all created Nature, which is but one great Myſtery; and yet the World is a very uſeful World, and we know in ſome good degree what uſe to make of it: And the Knowledge of thoſe Goſpel Myſteries which are the Subject of our preſent diſpute, are manifeſtly of infinite uſe to us, if the certain knowledge of the Pardon of Sin, and eternal Life, by the Obedience, and Sufferings, and Death, and Interceſſion of the Son of God Incarnate, be of any uſe; and therefore it became the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God to reveal theſe Myſteries of Salvation to us.

Eſpecially if we add to this, That the lapſed ſtate of Human Nature makes ſupernatural Knowledge neceſſary. Natural Knowledge we grant was ſufficient for a ſtate of Nature, though no man would have had reaſon to complain, had God in a ſtate of Innocence by a more familiar intercourſe with Man, or by the frequent Converſation of Angels, improved his Knowledge beyond the mere attainments of his Natural Faculties; and it is not improbable, but this might have been; I am ſure there is an impatient thirſt after knowledge in human Nature, and ſuch a great curioſity for ſecret and hidden Myſteries, that it looks very unnatural for Men to complain, that God Reveals more to them than Nature teaches.

But yet I ſay, Natural Knowledge muſt be allowed ſufficient to all the ends of Human Life, while man continued Innocent; for that is the Original ſtate of human Nature, as all men muſt grant, who believe that Man was made by God.

But when man ſinned, he forfeited the Favour of God, and a natural Immortality; and whether he ſhould be reſtored

ſtored or not, and by what means he ſhould be reſtored, depended wholly on the Sovereign Will and Pleaſure of God: And therefore the Light of Nature, though it could direct an Innocent Man how to Pleaſe and Worſhip God, and to preſerve himſelf Immortal, it could not teach Sinners how to make atonement for Sin, nor give them any certain hopes that God would forgive Sins, and beſtow immortal Life on them; which makes it neceſſary, that the Religion of a ſinner be a Revealed Religion. And if God in infinite Goodneſs is not only pleaſed to reſtore ſinners to Grace and Favour, but to advance them to a ſupernatural ſtate of Perfection and Happineſs both of Soul and Body in the next World; this muſt be done by ſupernatural Means, and therefore requires a ſupernatural Knowledge; for the Light of Nature can neither raiſe us above Nature, nor diſcover ſupernatural Truths to us; and this makes it neceſſary to know and believe ſuch things, as we have no natural Notion or Idea of, *Such things, as neither eye hath ſeen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entred into the heart of man to conceive.* If Nature can't ſave us, it can't diſcover to us the way of Salvation neither; and if we muſt be ſaved by a ſupernatural Grace and Power, it muſt be ſupernaturally Revealed; and what is Supernatural, is the Object of *Faith*, not of natural *Knowledge.*

This ſeems to me to give a plain account, Why God thinks fit to Reveal ſuch Myſteries to us as Nature cannot teach, and as we have no natural Notion of, Becauſe our lapſed ſtate has made ſuch ſupernatural Revelations neceſſary to the recovery of Mankind; and when we are fallen below the relief of Nature, and of natural Knowledge, we ought to be very thankful to our Good God for ſupernatural Knowledge, and ſupernatural Means of Salvation.

To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghoſt, Three Perſons, One Eternal God, be Honour, Glory and Power, now and for ever. Amen. *FINIS.*